

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7062

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BOGOTA 2735

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: ECON, PINS, PORS, CO, SNAR
SUBJ: CRIME IN COLOMBIA

REF: (76) BOGOTA A-109, (76) BOGOTA 8755 AND BOGOTA A-19

1. THIS TELEGRAM SUMMARIZES A-19 ON THE SAME SUBJECT.
2. STATISTICS COVERING CRIME IN 1975 AND 1976 SHOW THE LOWEST CRIME RATES IN RECENT HISTORY. UNFORTUNATELY, THE FIGURES PROBABLY REFLECT THE BREAKDOWN OF THE POLICE AND JUDICIAL SYSTEMS RATHER THAN A DECREASE IN CRIME. FOR INSTANCE, CRIME RATES DECLINED MOST SIGNIFICANTLY IN AREAS THAT ARE NOW LIVING IN CRIMINAL ANARCHY. FIGURES ON THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM TELL AN EVEN MORE REVEALING TALE. IN 11 PRINCIPAL CITIES THE BACKLOG OF CASES IN THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM AT THE END OF 1975 MEANT THAT THE EFFICIENCY OF THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM WOULD HAVE TO DOUBLE EVERY YEAR FOR FIVE YEARS JUST TO HANDLE THE CURRENT LEVEL OF REPORTED CRIMES. IF UNREPORTED CRIMES (WHICH PROBABLY EXCEED REPORTED CRIMES) WERE INCLUDED, THE SITUATION WOULD APPEAR EVEN MORE GRAVE.
3. COLOMBIA'S HIGH CRIME RATE IS ROOTED IN ITS ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL HISTORY -- ITS VIOLENT AND PROLONGED RURAL GUERRILLA-BASED STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE, THE VIOLENCIA AND SUBSEQUENT

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URBANIZATION BASED LARGELY ON IMMIGRANTS PARDONED OR FLEEING FROM THE RURAL VIOLENCE. MOREOVER, THE EMERGENCE OF ENTREPRE-NEURIAL, MATERIALISTIC MAN IN COLOMBIA AMIDST PATERNALISTIC, MERCANTILISTIC PEDANTIC SPANISH POST COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION GAVE A MALIGNANT TWIST TO COLOMBIA'S MODERNIZATION. WHEN THE NARCOTICS BUSINESS MOVED TO COLOMBIA IT FOUND EXTENSIVE CONTRABAND NETWORKS, AN ORGANIZED CRIMINAL CLASS, A LARGE CRIMINAL

SUBCULTURE, A JUDICIAL SYSTEM CLOGGED UP, POORLY EQUIPPED IN HUMAN AND MATERIAL RESOURCES, CORRUPT, INCREDIBLY BUREAUCRATIZED AND MOVING BACKWARDS. NARCOTICS TOOK HOLD ON THE NORTH COAST AS CONTRABAND HAD JUST A DECADE PREVIOUSLY AND SPREAD RAPIDLY NATIONWIDE.

4. IN THE PAST THE GOVERNING CLASS TOLERATED A HIGH LEVEL OF STREET CRIME BECAUSE THE SYSTEM PLACED THE MAN OF INFLUENCE AND WEALTH ABOVE THE LAW. THEY ALSO WELCOMED THE WIDER RANGE OF GOODS CONTRABAND BROUGHT TO THEIR MARKETS. BUT AS THE SYSTM BREAKS DOWN, THE GOVERNING CLASS IS INCREASINGLY THREATENED. THE ECONOMIC COSTS OF CRIME ARE ENORMOUS, THE THREAT OF KIDNAPPING A DAILY CONCERN, AND IN THE PRESENT MACRO ECONOMIC CONTEXT, THE DRUG DOLLARS THREATEN THE HEALTH OF THE ENTIRE LEGITIMATE ECONOMY. CONTRABAND DOLLARS ENTERED THE ECONOMY IN INCREASING FLOODS JUST AS COFFEE PRICES WERE AT THEIR HISTORICAL HIGH, REQUIRING STRINGENT MONETARY CONTROLS. THE CONTROLS HAVE STIFLED THE GROWTH OF LEGITIMATE BUSINESS SINCE 1975. THE CRIME SAPS THE STRENGTH OF LEGITIMATE BUSINESS BY ABSORBING CREDIT, INFLATING THE ECONOMY, DISTORTING MARKETS, IMPOSING REAL RESOURCE COSTS AND RAISING INSURANCE PRICES. IT PAYS NO TAXES YET REQUIRES INCREASED GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURES. MOREOVER, THE NEW CRIMINALLY WEALTHY CONSUME CONSPICUOUSLY, FLAUNTING WEALTH, AND EXACERBATING INCOME DISTRIBUTION, WHICH INCREASES PRESSURE ON LEGITIMATE BUSINESS, AGAIN INCREASING TAXES AND WAGES.

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5. WHILE THE INSECURITY, STREET CRIME, THEFT, ETC., COULD CONTINUE TO GROW, THE COSTS OF THE NARCOTICS TRAFFICE ARE PROBABLY AT A PEAK. THE EXCESS COCAINE LIQUIDITY, WHICH HELPED CAUSE THE SEVERE MONETARY RESTRICTIONS, WILL SOON GIVE WAY TO A SITUATION IN WHICH LOWER COFFEE PRICES AND GROWING PETROLEUM IMPORTS WILL PUT DOWNWARD PRESSURE ON INTERNATIONAL RESERVES, ALLOWING A REMOVAL OF MONETARY RESTRICTIONS WHILE MAKING THE COCAINE DOLLARS RELATIVELY NICER THINGS TO HAVE. THIS COULD CHANGE THE ROLE NARCOTICS PLAYS FROM BEING PARASITICAL TO BEING MORE COMPLEMENTARY TO THE LEGITIMATE ECONOMY. WHEN THAT POINT IS REACHED THE PRIMARY THREAT BECOMES THE LIQUIDITY AND WEALTH OF THE CRIMINALS, AND THE INSECURITY.

6. THE CONCERN WITH CRIME, INSECURITY AND NARCOTICS INCOME, THEREFORE, IS PRESENTLY AT A PEAK IN COLOMBIA. THE MANUFACTURERS ARE CONCERNED, AS THEY SHOULD BE, AND AS THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR SHOULD BE CONCERNED. THE FINANCIAL AND COMMERCIAL SECTORS ARE LESS AFFECTED, BUT ALSO EXPRESS CONCERN. IF THE U.S. IS TO APPLY LEVERAGE FOR A SOLUTION THAT PRESERVES COLOMBIA'S DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS, IT WILL BE BY BUILDING UPON THE CONCERN OF THESE GROUPS WHO ARE THREATENED BY THE CRIME AND DRUGS AND WHO WOULD ALSO BE THREATENED BY A MILITARY DICTATORSHIP.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BOGOTA 2735

7. ANY COLOMBIAN EFFORT, HOWEVER SERIOUS, MIGHT NOT BE VERY EFFECTIVE AND MIGHT NOT BE WITHIN DUE PROCES. MOREOVER, OPEN WAR ON NARCOTICS RISKS THE CORRUPTION OF THE MILITARY OR WHICHEVER POLICE OR JUDICIAL AUTHORITY IS USED. IF THE SITUATION IS ALLOWED TO DRIFT, ON THE OTHER HAND, MORE MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNING CLASS WILL PROBABLY MOVE INTO THE NARCOTICS BUSINESS. THE FINANCIAL GROUPS WILL TAP THE LIQUIDITY OF THE MAFIAS; THE MORE RESPECTABLE OF THE NARCOTICS TRAFFICKERS, I.E., THE BLACK SHEEP FROM TRADITIONAL FAMILIES, WILL BUY INTO THE FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS; IN ORDER TO WASH GREATER AMOUNTS OF NARCOTICS DOLLARS AND PESOS, THE FRONT BUSINESS WILL GROW; AND A GRADUAL BLURRING OF THE SOURCES OF INCOME WILL OCCUR, REDUCING THE INHIBITIONS MANY COLOMBIANS STILL HAVE ABOUT SHARING IN THE DRUG BONANZA. IN THE LONGER TERM, THE FORMER, OPEN WAR, MAY BE A GREATER THREAT TO THE CONTINUING EVOLUTION OF A PLURALISTIC DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY THAN THE LATTER, PARTICIPATION. SO THAT, IF THE UNITED STATES IS TO USE THE FEW TOOLS THAT MIGHT STIMULATE A SERIOUS EFFORT AGAINST NARCOTICS TRAFFIC, WE SHOULD PROBABLY BE PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE ON A FAIRLY WIDE AND DECISIVE SCALE TO HELP RETARD THE ROTTING PROCESS CAUSED BY THE ENORMOUS AMOUNTS OF MONEY THE MAFIAS CAN USE TO SUBVERT THE SYSTEM. THE FUNDAMENTAL ECONOMICS OF THE BUSINESS ARE THAT THE MORE SUCCESSFUL THE INTERDICTION EFFORTS, THE HIGHER THE PRICE, THE GREATER THE PROFIT AND HENCE THE GREATER AMOUNT OF THE INCOME THAT CAN BE USED FOR BRIBES. IF THE
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AMERICAN POLITICAL SYSTEM IS GOING TO EVENTUALLY INSIST THAT THE UNITED STATES FORCE DECISIVE ACTION, THEN WE SHOULD BEGIN WHILE THE THREAT IS AT A PEAK, AND NOT WAIT UNTIL THE NARCOTICS BUSINESS IS THOROUGHLY INTERWOVEN INTO THE COLOMBIAN POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FABRIC.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPLEMENT THOSE CONTAINED IN THE NCAP FOLLOW IN A SUBSEQUENT CABLE.
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